

NASA News



National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Goddard Space Flight Center
Wallops Flight Facility
Wallops Island, VA 23337-5099

For Release: March 17, 2003

Betty Flowers
Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, VA
elizabeth.b.flowers@nasa.gov
(Phone: 757-824-1584)

RELEASE NO.: 03-05

NASA BALLOON FLIGHT TERMINATED EARLY

The test flight of NASA's new Ultra-Long Duration Balloon (ULDB) was terminated 12 hours 13 minutes following launch Monday morning from Alice Springs, Australia.

The ULDB was launched at 8:38 a.m., March 17. (Alice Springs local time) (6:08 p.m. EST, March 16). The balloon reached an altitude of approximately 110,000 feet (34,300 meters) prior to beginning a gradual descent, possibly caused by a leak.

The balloon and its scientific payload landed 130 nautical miles (approximately 241 kilometers) west-southwest of Ayres Rock in the Australian Outback. There were no injuries or damage to personal property. Recovery operations are underway.

"A team is reviewing data from the flight and will be examining the recovered experimental balloon. A recommendation concerning possible design changes to the experimental balloon is expected during the coming weeks," said Steve Smith, Chief of the Balloon Program Office at the NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va. "We remain confident in the concept of the ULDB and in providing scientists with a new means of studying the Earth and space," he said.

The ULDB was carrying a 6,000 pound (2,717.4 kilogram) science experiment called NIGHTGLOW, a collaboration between NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, and the New Mexico State University Particle Astrophysics Lab in Las Cruces.

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The ULDB is the largest-single cell, super pressure (fully sealed) balloon ever flown. While the test flight was expected to last only about two weeks and circumnavigate the globe, the ULDB is designed to support missions for up to 100 days. Balloons provide cost-effective platforms for near-space observations.

Further information on the ULDB program can be found at:

<http://www.wff.nasa.gov/~uldb/index.html>

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